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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify the academic, personal, and social expectations of incoming college freshmen and examine the effects of orientation programming on modifying unrealistic expectations held by some students. A total of 201 paid-deposit incoming freshmen at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, completed a 30-item survey questionnaire mailed to them in May, while 108 different freshmen at Miami completed the same survey after the freshman orientation program. The study found that many pre-orientation respondents had unrealistic academic, personal, and social expectations concerning their future college experience. This was especially true in such areas as expected grades, course difficulty, course content, need for outside help, self-discipline, and relationships with fellow students. Students surveyed after the orientation program tended to have more realistic expectations in many, but not all, areas. A copy of the questionnaire items and three-way analysis of variance results (ANOVA) are appended. (MDM)

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FIRST-YEAR STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: PRE- AND POST-ORIENTATION

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Introduction

Every year college freshmen enter institutions of higher education with a set of preconceived ideas and expectations. In some cases, these expectations are unrealistic and can result in a student facing academic or social failure and withdrawal from the institution. The purpose of this study was to identify the academic, personal and social expectations of first-year students at Miami.

In May, 300 paid-deposit students (randomly selected with an over sampling of minorities) were mailed the "PEEK-Perceptions, Expectations, Emotions and Knowledge about college," a 30-item survey designed to measure student expectations in three areas: academic, personal and social. A list of the questions and the available responses are in Appendix A. A response rate of 68% was obtained from this group. During Orientation, first year students were involved in various intervention activities designed to assist them in understanding the context of a college education. These activities included small group discussions with faculty and staff about student life at Miami University, individual faculty and academic advisor meetings, and student awareness skits. In August, 300 students who had attended Orientation (randomly selected, excluding students who participated in the first mailing) were mailed the same survey. With 96% of Miami's first-year students attending Orientation, the responses of this group can be considered reflective of the attitudes of the incoming students. A response rate of 36% was obtained from this group. Due to the fact that the second group was sampled after Orientation, we have been able to make some comparisons between students' attitudes before Orientation and students' attitudes and expectations after attending Orientation. A three-way Analysis of Variance was conducted on all 30 questions using gender, student of color status and Pre- Post-Orientation group. These analyses were conducted to help legitimize our findings. Results of these analyses are available upon request. Any significant differences between Pre- Post-Orientation groups that are found should be interpreted very carefully due to the fact that the same students were not involved; however, when differences do occur discussion can arise on possible explanations and interpretations. A breakdown of some demographic information about these two groups can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

	Pre-Orientation N = 201		Post-Orientation N = 108		Total Survey Group N = 309		First-Year Students N = 3,364	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	78	39%	33	32%	113	37%	1,411	42%
Female	119	59%	72	67%	191	62%	1,953	58%
Students of Color	42	21%	8	7%	50	16%	285	8%
White	159	76%	100	88%	259	84%	3,079	92%
Ohio Resident	139	69%	67	63%	206	67%	2,363	70%
ACT > 22	162	81%	93	87%	255	83%	2,327	83%
ACT > 25	99	49%	60	56%	159	51%	1,355	48%
Division of Major								
CAS	72	36%	33	31%	105	34%	1,676	50%
SEAP	35	17%	8	7%	43	14%	397	12%
SBA	36	18%	19	18%	55	18%	843	25%
SFA	6	3%	11	10%	17	6%	212	6%
SAS	8	4%	10	9%	18	6%	189	6%
SIS	3	1%	0	0%	3	1%	47	1%
Undeclared	34	17%	25	23%	59	19%	0	0%

Academic Experiences

First-year students appear to have an impression of academic life that includes 1) dependence on faculty for learning assistance -- over 40% indicate that it is likely that an instructor will tell them if they are having difficulty in a course; almost 25% expect instructors to teach them study skills needed for their courses; nearly 20% say it's likely that their college instructors will keep track for them of how well they are keeping up with assignments and following the syllabus; over 50% indicate that it is likely their college instructors will be concerned about how well they are doing; and 2) expectations that academically college will be a repeat of high school -- 96% indicate it is likely their grades will be the same as in high school; over 60% expect not to have trouble doing well in their classes; 40% indicate that it is likely that the material presented in class will repeat what is in the textbook (See Table 2).

Interestingly, for those students responding after attending Orientation their expectations towards their academic abilities in college changed when compared to those of the students responding before Orientation, perhaps a result of the intervention on the part of the staff and faculty involved in Orientation (Table 2). Those expecting a repetition of textbook material dropped by over 20%; expectation of academic performance dropped by almost 20% while grade expectations only dropped by 3%; and expectation on faculty involvement in the student's learning (the instructor will tell them if they are having difficulty in a course) dropped by almost 15%. From the three-way ANOVA, significant differences were found by gender (instructor involvement); by Pre- Post-Orientation group (grade expectations, repetition of textbook material, expectation of academic performance) and by gender x student of color status (grade expectations, repetition of textbook material and instructor involvement). These results are summarized in Appendix B.

Table 2

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES	Extremely, Quite or Somewhat Likely		
	Total	Pre-Orientation	Post-Orientation
My college grades should be about the same as were my high school grades.	96%	97%	94%
If I am having difficulty in a course, the instructor will tell me.	43%	48%	34%
The material presented by my instructors will simply repeat what is in my textbooks.	40%	48%	27%
My college instructors will be concerned about how well I am doing in their courses.	52%	54%	49%
I will not have trouble doing well in any of my courses.	63%	70%	52%
My college instructors will teach me the study skills I will need for their courses.	24%	26%	21%
My college instructors will keep track for me of how well I am following the class syllabus and keeping up with my assignments.	17%	20%	11%

Personal Experiences

Pre-Orientation students expect to succeed at Miami University. They appear to be very confident in their preparation to perform college-level work and to participate actively in taking responsibility for their own learning. Post-Orientation figures show a dramatic change in the students' emotional reactions to whether they are prepared to do college-level work. It would seem that students begin to develop a more realistic picture of the collegiate environment after Orientation (see Table 3). Interestingly after Orientation, this realistic picture of Miami University leads the students to have lower confidence in their ability to succeed. Significant difference found in a three-way ANOVA (gender by students of color status by Pre- Post-Orientation groups) are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	Extremely, Quite or Somewhat Likely		
	Total	Pre-Orientation	Post-Orientation
I will not need any outside help to do well in my courses.	51%	59%	36%
I will know exactly how college fits into my future goals and plans.	84%	89%	73%
It will be difficult to discipline myself to keep academic committments, such as attending classes and being prepared for class.	26%	20%	38%
I am worried that I won't make it through college.	19%	16%	24%
The reading skills I developed in high school will be adequate for my college courses.	83%	88%	74%

Social Experiences

Students' perceptions of family interaction, peer pressure and interaction with students who have values similar to their own changed the most between Pre- and Post-Orientation. Eighty-one percent of the students in the Pre-Orientation survey indicate they are likely to interact with students that have similar values to their own, while only 69% believe this to be true after Orientation. Ten percent more students in the Post-Orientation group perceive that the relationship with their family will likely change when they go to college. Miami University first-year students expect to experience a lot of social pressure in college and that impression increased in the Post-Orientation group (see Table 4).

Interestingly, men seemed to experience more change in the social experiences area than women when comparing the Pre- and Post-Orientation groups. After Orientation, more men expressed the likelihood for a changing relationship with their high school friends, the need to work at making new friends when they are on campus, and understanding that their classmates will have different values than themselves. A three-way ANOVA was conducted on the social experiences items (gender by students of color status by Pre- Post-Orientation group) and the significant differences are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES		Extremely, Quite or Somewhat Likely		
		Total	Pre-Orientation	Post-Orientation
I will have to work at making new friends.	Total	60%	59%	62%
	Men	59%	54%	71%
	Women	60%	61%	57%
My relationship with my family will not change when I go to college.	Total	60%	64%	54%
My relationships with my high school friends will not change when I go to college.	Total	36%	38%	32%
	Men	41%	46%	29%
	Women	32%	32%	32%
Most of my classmates will have values similar to mine.	Total	76%	81%	69%
	Men	77%	83%	63%
	Women	76%	79%	72%
I will experience a lot of social pressure in college.	Total	79%	75%	85%

Students of Color

Significant differences cannot be found between the total group of white students and the students of color. However, within the students of color group there seems to be a wide range of differences. Most of these differences result from the surveys completed by African American students. The African American students comprised 15 of the 50 students of color in the total survey. There were not enough students of color in the Post-Orientation group to examine differences between Pre-Orientation and Post-Orientation groups.

African American students see themselves interacting less with faculty members and feeling that faculty members will have less interest in them (Table 5). Only 20% of the African American students believe they will have frequent opportunities to talk with their instructor as compared to 40% of the white students, and no African American students felt like their instructor would be concerned with how they are doing in class. African American students expressed an intent to join fewer organizations than they were involved in during high school. They also indicated having more stress than white students and concern on how college fits into their future goals. African American students expect to interact with students whose values are different than their own. African American students have different perceptions and expectations than white students and other students of color.

Table 5

ACADEMIC, PERSONAL & SOCIAL EXPERIENCES	Extremely or Quite Likely		
	White	Students of Color*	African American
If I am having difficulty in a course, the instructor will tell me.	15%	12%	0%
I will know exactly how college fits into my future goals and plans.	45%	52%	26%
My college instructors will be very concerned about how well I am doing in their courses.	16%	14%	0%
Most of my classmates will have values similar to mine.	30%	20%	6%
In college, I will join fewer student organizations than I joined in high school.	20%	30%	40%
There will be frequent opportunities to talk to my college instructors.	40%	35%	20%
I will not feel stressed in college.	5%	14%	20%
My college instructors will get to know me on a personal level.	24%	24%	13%

* Includes African American students.

Conclusion

Miami first-year students come to the university with a set of expectations that we as faculty and administrators involved in the learning and development of the student must be made aware of. Coming in with unrealistic expectations can lead to disillusionment and failure. Orientation can serve as an important intervention experience to assist students in developing a realistic view of college experiences. As evidenced by this study, Orientation seems to help frame Miami University as a community of learners with a rigorous academic program. Areas where student expectations differed between the Pre-Orientation and Post-Orientation groups were:

- students' anticipated interaction with faculty
- students' perception of their peers and peer influence
- expected level of faculty participation in the student's learning process
- students' perceived academic skills as they enter college
- students' perception of academic assistance for success

This report represents only a portion of the data that was collected and analyzed. For more detailed information, you may contact Denise Krallman, Institutional Research Analyst in the Office of Budgeting, Planning and Analysis. If you have comments or questions regarding this study, please let a member of the Student Affairs Assessment Committee know. The committee members are: Kip Alishio, Harold Brown, Linda Dixon, Karen Hater, Todd Holcomb, Denise Krallman, Richard Nault, Steve Ransom, Dennis Roberts, Karl Schilling, and Diane Weber.

APPENDIX A

PEEK: Perceptions, Expectations, Emotions and Knowledge about College
Weinstein, C., Palmer, D., and Hanson, G. 1995, H&H Publishing Company, Inc.

Available Responses:

Extremely likely to be a part of my college experience.
Quite likely to be a part of my college experience.
Somewhat likely to be a part of my college experience.
Not very likely to be a part of my college experience.
Not at all likely to be a part of my college experience.

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

My college grades should be about the same as were my high school grades.
If I am having difficulty in a course, the instructor will tell me.
The material presented by my instructors will simply repeat what is in my textbooks.
My college instructors will be concerned about how well I am doing in their courses.
I will not have trouble doing well in any of my courses.
It will be more important to memorize what is being presented in my classes than to think about it
My college instructors will teach me the study skills I will need for their courses.
There will be frequent opportunities to talk to my college instructors.
My college instructors will keep track for me of how well I am following the class syllabus and keeping up with my assignments.
I will have to check to see if I understand the material in my textbooks and other reading assignments.

PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS

I will not need any outside help to do well in my courses.
I will know exactly how college fits into my future goals and plans.
It will be difficult to discipline myself to keep academic commitments, such as attending classes and being prepared for class.
I will have to take a lot of responsibility for my own learning.
There is nothing I will rather be doing than getting my college degree.
I will have to generate my own interest in my college courses.
I will sometimes feel overwhelmed by the workload.
I will not feel stressed in college.
I am worried that I won't make it through college.
The reading skills I developed in high school will be adequate for my college courses.

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

I will have to work at making new friends.
My relationship with my family will not change when I go to college.
My relationships with my high school friends will not change when I go to college.
Most of my classmates will have values similar to mine.
I expect to be treated more like a number and less like a person.
In college, I will join fewer student organizations than I joined in high school.
I will experience a lot of social pressures in college.
I will be exposed to students with a wide range of ages.
I will meet students with many different cultural backgrounds.
My college instructors will get to know me on a personal level.

APPENDIX B
THREE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS

Survey Item	Gender	Student of Color	Pre-Post Orientation	AB	AC	BC	ABC
	A	B	C				
My college grades should be about the same as were my high school grades.			X	X			
I will not need any outside help to do well in my courses.			X				
I will know exactly how college fits into my future goals and plans.			X				
My relationship with my family will not change when I go to college.			X				
The material presented by my instructors will simply repeat what is in my textbooks.			X	X			
It will be difficult to discipline myself to keep academic commitments, such as attending classes and being prepared for class.						X	
Most of my classmates will have values similar to mine.			X				
I will not have trouble doing well in any of my classes.			X				
There is nothing I will rather be doing than getting my college degree.			X				
It will be more important to memorize what is being presented in my classes than to think about it.		X					
My college instructors will teach me the study skills I will need for their courses.				X			
I will not feel stressed in college.	X						
My college instructors will keep track for me of how well I am following the class syllabus and keeping up with my assignments.	X						
I am worried that I won't make it through college.	X	X					
The reading skills I developed in high school will be adequate for my college courses.			X				

X = p < .05